

THE HUNGER-BITE

NO. 1510

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“His strength shall be hunger-bitten.”
Job 18:12.

BILDAD was declaring the history of the hypocritical, presumptuous, and wicked man and he intended, no doubt, to insinuate that Job was just such a person—that he had been a deceiver, and that therefore at last God’s providence had found him out and was visiting him for his sins. In this, Bildad was guilty of great injustice to his friend. All the three miserable comforters of Job were mistaken in the special aim of their discourses and yet, concerning the speeches of each one, it may be said that their general statements were, for the most part, true. They uttered truths, but they drew mistaken inferences and they were ungenerous in the imputations which they cast upon Job.

It is true that, sooner or later, either in this world or the next, all conceivable curses fall upon the hypocrite and the ungodly man, but it is not true that when a Christian is in trouble we are to judge that he is suffering for his sin. It would be both cruel and wicked for us to think so. Nevertheless, because what Bildad said was, in the main, true, though unkindly and wrongly applied, we feel ourselves quite at liberty to take a text out of his mouth.

It is true of many persons that their strength shall be hunger-bitten and I shall speak concerning these words in three ways, noticing first, that *this is a curse which will surely be fulfilled upon the ungodly*. Secondly, *this is a discipline which God often exercises upon the self-righteous when He means to save them*. And, thirdly—and it is grievous work to have to say it—*this is a form of chastisement upon believers who are not living near to God as they ought to be*—their strength becomes hunger-bitten.

I. First we shall view our text as A CURSE WHICH WILL BE FULFILLED UPON THE UNGODLY. “His strength shall be hunger-bitten.”

It is not said that *they* are hunger-bitten merely, but that their *strength* is so, and if their strength is hunger-bitten, what must their weakness be? When a man’s strength is bitten with hunger, what a hunger must be raging throughout the whole of his nature.

Now, a large proportion of men make their gold to be their strength, their castle, and their high tower, and for a while they rejoice in their wealth and find great satisfaction in gathering it, in seeing it multiplied, and in hoping by-and-by that it shall come to great store. But every ungodly man ought to know that riches are not forever and often they take to themselves wings and fly away. Men of colossal fortunes have dwindled down to beggars. They made great ventures and realized great failures. None are secure. As long as a man is in this world, he is like a ship at sea, he is still liable to be shipwrecked.

O you that are boasting in your gold and calling your treasure your chief good, the day may come when your strength will be hunger-bitten and like the victims of famine, you will find yourselves helpless—you whose money aforetime answered all things and made you feel omnipotent.

But it will be said, of course, that it is not in every case that the ungodly man’s strength of wealth is hunger-bitten and I willingly concede it. But it comes to pass in another fashion. How many there are who keep their wealth and yet, for all that, are very poor? It is not that the gold goes, but it stays by them and does not comfort them. I do not know which would be the worse of the two—to be hungry for want of bread or to have abundance of bread and yet remain hungry, eat whatever you might.

Thousands in this world are precisely in that condition. They have all that heart could wish, if their heart were right, but it seems nothing to them because they have envy in their spirits. Remember Haman. He is invited to the banquet of wine, he is a chief noble of the empire, he has his monarch’s favor, but all

that avails him nothing because Mordecai sits in the gate. Envy has cankered his soul and if he were able to mount to the throne of Ahasuerus himself, it would make no difference to him—he would be unhappy there—and all because one poor Jew will not bow to him. There are persons going up and down Cheapside every day who are intolerably wretched about a something which they would hardly like to mention to reasonable men. A wretched trifle frets them like a moth in a garment and all the glory of their position is eaten away—their strength is hunger-bitten.

Where the canker does not happen to be envy, it may come to be a passion akin to it, namely, revenge. Alas, that we should have to talk of revenge as still existing upon this earth after Christ has been here and taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Yet there are ungodly men who even think it right to foster resentments. A word uncourteously spoken, a deed unkindly done, will be laid up and an opportunity sought for retaliation. Or if not, a hope will be cherished that some blight or blow from God may fall upon the offender. And if that offender still bears himself aloft and lives right merrily and makes no recompense for the wrong done, the aggrieved one has eaten out his own heart with chagrin, and the strength of his wealth has been hunger-bitten.

Where this has not been the case, it has, perhaps, more frequently happened that persons have been afflicted by avarice. Nothing more tends to impoverish a man than being rich. It is a hard thing to find a rich man who enjoys riches. A rich man is a man who has all he wants, and many a man is rich on a few shillings a week. A poor man is a man who does not get what he wants, and people with thousands a year are in that list. In fact, where shall you find such poverty as among those poor rich men?

The miser is often pictured as afraid to sleep because thieves may break in—he rises at midnight to look over his hoarded treasure. He is afraid lest bonds, securities, mortgages and the like may, after all, turn out to be mere waste paper. He frets and stews and mars his life because he has too great a means of living—such a man may not be very common, but it is an easy thing to find people who have very much and yet are just as careful, just as grasping, just as fretful after more, as if they had but newly started in business and were almost penniless—their strength is hunger-bitten.

If somebody had told them, “You will one day reach to so many thousand pounds,” they would have said, “Ah, if ever I get that amount I shall be perfectly satisfied.” They have saved that sum long ago and ten times as much, and now they say, “Ah, you don’t know what it is to want money till you have a good portion of it. Now we have so much we must have more. We are up to our necks in the golden stream and we must needs swim where the bottom cannot be touched.”

Poor fools! They have enough water to float them, but they must have enough to drown in. One stick is a capital thing for a lame man, as I know right well, but a thousand sticks would make a terrible load for a man to carry. When anyone has a sufficiency, let him be thankful for so convenient a staff, but if he will not use what he has until he has accumulated much more, the comfort of his substance is gone and his strength is hunger-bitten.

There are cases in which the hunger-bite does not take a shape which I could well describe. Instances are met with of persons who have made their gold their strength, who are altogether unrestful. Some have thought that their brain was diseased, but it is likely that the disease was lower down and in their hearts. We have known wealthy men who believed themselves to be poor and were haunted with the idea that they should die in the poor house, even when they were worth a million. And others who have quarreled about the division of a farthing, when the loss of ten thousand pounds would have been a flea bite to them. In great substance they have found no substantial rest.

They have often wished they could be as cheerful as their own menial servants. As they have lolled in their carriage and looked at the rosy cheeks of the urchins in the village, they have coveted their health and felt willing to wear their rags if they could possess their appetites. As they have looked upon poor persons with family loves and domestic joys, and felt that their own joys were few in that direction, they have greatly envied them. It is a great mercy when the worldling is made uneasy in this world—it is a ground for hope that God means to wean him from his idols. But alas, there are some who do not rest

here and will not rest hereafter. They have no rest in all that God has given them under the sun and yet they will not fly to Him who is the soul's sure repose.

I need not dwell for another moment upon the failure of the strength which is found in riches. It is the same with all sorts of men who try to find comfort out of Christ and away from God, "Their strength shall be hunger-bitten."

What a melancholy instance of this is Solomon. He had an opportunity to try everything in his quest for the chief good, and he did test everything, so that we need not repeat the experiment. He was the great alchemist who tried to turn all manner of metals into gold, but failed with them all. At one time he was building great palaces and when the building fit was on him, he seemed happy. But when once the gorgeous piles were finished, he said, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity."

Then he would take to gardening and to the planting of rare plants and trees, and to the digging of fountains, but when he had done enough of this, he looked upon his orchard and vineyards, and again muttered, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity."

Then he thought he would try laughter and madness—the comic side of human life he would test, as well as the useful. So he plunged into all manner of pleasures, and gathered to himself singing men and singing women, and all delights of the flesh, but after he had drank deep of that cup, he said again, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity."

Poor Solomon! He had great strength, but his strength was hunger-bitten. He looked here and there, up and down, on the right hand and on the left, and found no bread for his soul. He snatched at shadows and tried to feed himself with bubbles. He was devoured with hunger in the midst of plenty and where the humble people of Israel were blessing the God who satisfied their mouth with good things and renewed their youth like the eagles, poor Solomon was complaining that there was nothing new under the sun and that it was better for a man not to be born than to have lived at all.

Now remark that if this hunger does not come upon the ungodly man during the former part of his life, it will come to him at the close of it. While we have much to do and our minds are occupied, we may be able to put off thought, but when at last God sends to us that messenger with the bony hand, whose oratory is soul piercing—the dullness of whose eyeless eye darts fire into the soul—then will all human strength be hunger-bitten. When death is left alone with the man, then he perceives that his money bags contain nothing precious, because he must leave them. How now with his broad acres? How now with his large estates? How now with his palatial residence? How now with all that he called dear? How now with his doctor's degree and his learning? How now with his fame and his honor? How now even with his domestic comforts and the joys of life? Hunger-bitten are they all.

When he comes to die, they cannot help him. The soul that is within him, which he would not allow to speak, now opens its hungry mouth and cries, "You have denied me bread. God, and God alone, could fill me and you have denied me God. And now you feel the hunger which has come upon me and you *must* feel it and feel it, too, forever." Alas, alas, alas, for a man to have spent all his life in earning a disappointment, laboring hard to lose his soul, sweating and straining to lose the race, tugging and toiling to be damned, for that is the case of many a man and that is where the tide drifts with all mankind who seek for lasting good apart from God, and apart from the blood and righteousness of God's dear Son. Of each one of them it shall be said, "His strength shall be hunger-bitten."

I have said these things mournfully to my own heart. But I would say to any of you who may not be rich, but who are looking for your good in your own little home and the comforts of it—any of you young men who are seeking the great object of life in learning or the like—if you are not living for God, your strength will be hunger-bitten. If you do not "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," whatever you gain and however satisfied you may be for a little while, an awful hunger must ultimately come upon you and you will then lament that you spent your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfies not.

II. Briefly, in the second place, we shall speak of our text as indicating A KIND OF DISCIPLINE THROUGH WHICH GOD PUTS THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS WHEN HE MEANS TO SAVE THEM.

Many people are very religious and yet are not saved. They are unsaved because they go about to establish their own righteousness and have not submitted themselves to the righteousness which is of God in Jesus Christ. Now, these persons may for a while be very well satisfied with their own righteousness and if they are not the children of God, they will be satisfied with it for life. Some of them talk in this way, "I don't know that I ever wronged anybody. I have always been honest and honorable in my transactions, and I have brought up my children respectably. I have had a hard fight of it and for all that nobody could say that I ever disgraced my character."

It is not very long ago that I was driven by a cabman, an aged man, and when I got out of his cab I referred to his age and he remarked upon it himself. I said, "Well, I trust when this life is over you will have a portion in a better world." "Yes, I think so, sir," he said. "I was never drunk, that I know of, in my life. I was always reckoned a civil man, never used bad language, and I go to church *sometimes*." He seemed to be perfectly satisfied and was quite astonished that I did not express my assurance of his safety. His confidence is the common reliance of all classes of Englishmen and though they may not always put it in that shape, yet that is the notion—that by a sort of goodness, a very poor and mangled goodness—men may, after all, enter heaven.

Now, when God means to save a man, the hunger of the heart comes in and devours all his boasted excellence. Why, a spiritually hungry soul would take fifty years of self-righteousness and swallow them up like a morsel and cry for more. Our goodness is nothing compared with the demands of the law and the necessities of the case. Our fine righteousnesses, how they shrivel up like autumn leaves when the Spirit of God acts as a frost to them. Our virtues are as a meadow in the spring bedecked with golden kingcups, but when the Spirit of God blows upon it, the grass withers and the flower thereof fades, for all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of grass.

It is a part of the operation of the Holy Ghost to wither all the goodness of human nature and to destroy all those lovely flowers of natural virtue in which we put such store, cutting them down as with a mower's scythe. In truth, there is none good, no, not one. We are all shut up in unbelief and sin by nature. In the best of natures, sin affects the whole body, "The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint"—and it is a great blessing when the Holy Spirit makes us feel this. Painful is the feeling, but blessed is the result when, once for all, our strength is hunger-bitten.

Ay, and there are some who are very satisfied because, in addition to a commendable life, they have performed certain ceremonies to which they impute great sanctity. There is a theory abroad nowadays which some persons who are not in either the lunatic or the idiot asylum believe, namely, the theory that sacramental performances convey grace. It is wonderful how a rational being can ever think so, but there are persons, who are apparently rational in other things, who believe that the sprinkling of drops of water upon an infant's brow regenerates it, that the eating of bread and the drinking of wine really convey Christ to the soul, and so on, that aqueous applications and materialistic festivities can bring spiritual good to the heart—a monstrous doctrine, worthy of the priests of Baal—but so foolish as to make one doubt his ears when he hears it stated.

Because they have gone through these operations and have been confirmed and I do not know what besides, many are content. Others who happen to belong to a dissenting community, have passed through the ordeal of joining the church, or have attended class meetings, and have subscribed to the various societies, think that, therefore, they are saved. Heirs of hell will rest content with such outward things, but heirs of heaven never can. Their strength, if they make external religion their strength, will by-and-by be hunger-bitten and they will cry out, "My God, my soul pants for You as the hart pants for the water-brooks. I cannot be satisfied with outward forms, I want inward grace and I cannot be content with being told that the grace went with the form. I want to know the grace of God in truth, I pine to feel it, I pine to exhibit it in my own life."

To be told I was born again when I was a babe will not satisfy *me*. I want to feel the inner life, the new life of God within my spirit. To be told that I did eat Christ when I ate the bread will not content me. My heart longs to know that Christ is really in me the hope of glory and that I am living upon Him.

If I cannot have communion with God and with His dear Son for myself in my very soul, I turn with loathing from every substitute, ritualistic, priestly, or otherwise. Beloved, I would have you flee from every sacrament to the Savior. I would have you fly away from ceremonies to the cross of Christ. There is your only hope. Look to Him by faith—for all the rest without this is but outward and carnal, and can minister no good to your spirit. May your strength be hunger-bitten if you are resting in anything which is external and unspiritual.

Many a person has known what it is to have this hunger-bite go right through everything he rested in. I once knew what it was to get a little comfort from my prayers before I found the Savior, but when the Spirit of God dealt with me, I saw that my prayers wanted praying over again. I thought I had some sort of repentance and I began to be contented with it, but when the Spirit of God came, I found that my repentance needed to be repented of. I had felt some confidence in my Bible readings and hoped that my regular attendance upon public worship would bring me salvation, but I found that I was after all mocking the Word, for I was reading it, but not believing it, hearing it, but not accepting it. I was increasing my knowledge and my responsibility and yet was not rendering obedience to God.

Dear soul, if you are resting anywhere short of Christ, may your strength be hunger-bitten. You are at your strongest when you are utter weakness apart from Him. When you rest in Him completely and alone, then is salvation accomplished in you, but not till then. May God in His infinite mercy grant that all your strength apart from Christ may be hunger-bitten and that speedily.

III. Lastly, and very earnestly—and perhaps this last part may have more reference to most of you than anything I have said—I believe THERE ARE MANY OF GOD’S SERVANTS WHOSE STRENGTH IS LAMENTABLY HUNGER-BITTEN.

In this age we are all busy, and through being busy we are apt to neglect the soul-feeding ordinances. I mean the reading of Scripture, the hearing of the Word, meditation upon it, prayer and communion with God. Some of you do not rise as soon as you might in the morning and prayer is hurried over. And too often at eventide you are half-asleep with the many cares of the day and prayer is offered in a slovenly way.

Nor is this all, for during the day when, if you were as you should be, you would be praying without ceasing, there is this to think of, and that, and the other—and such a pressure of business that prayers are few. How can you pray? You did at one time. You used to get a text of Scripture in the morning and chew it all day, and you used to get much sweetness out of it and your soul grew. But now, instead of a text of Scripture, you have pressing engagements as soon as you are out of bed. You would, now and then, steal into a mid-day prayer meeting, perhaps, or get two or three minutes alone, but you have gradually dropped that habit and you have felt justified in doing so for, “really, time is so precious and there is so much to do in this age of competition.”

Dear friend, I am no judge for you, but let me ask you whether you are not becoming hunger-bitten through not feeding upon the Word of God. Souls cannot be strong without spiritual meat any more than bodies can be well when meals are neglected. There is a good rule I have heard mothers say about children and chickens—“little and often”—and I think it is true with Christians. They need little and often during the day—not a long passage of Scripture, perhaps memory would fail, but a short passage now and a short passage then, and a little prayer here and a little prayer there. It is wonderful how souls grow in that way! Alas! I fear all this is neglected and spiritual strength is hunger-bitten.

Let us begin from this time forward to give attention to the sustenance of our souls. Let us daily feed upon the Word of God that we may grow thereby, so shall our strength no more be hunger-bitten.

END OF VOLUME 25

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

Dear Friends—I wish you all a Merry Christmas. May your joy be joy in the Lord. I have passed through a furnace of pain and sorrow, but I have reason to believe that my being in a genial climate has

greatly shortened the duration and mitigated the severity of the affliction. Amid your joys please pray for the preacher that he may be restored, and that eternal benefit to himself and to his readers may come out of these frequent trials. Indeed, they are very grievous, and yet the sharpest chastisement of a child is better than the brightest joy of a castaway. There is an end, and that end gathers increase of sweetness from the bitterness of the way. Peace be to you all.

Yours most heartily,
C. H. Spurgeon
Mentone, December 19, 1879

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